

Government Orders

NDP. I can assure members that my constituents learned their lesson that one time and now have gone back to the Liberal fold.

I have received five phone calls on the budget from people who were concerned about social programs. The remainder of the people in my riding have called to say this is a great budget because it sends us down the track. It also recognizes that we did not get into the mess in three years, like the Reform Party seems to suggest, and we will not get out of it in three years as it suggests.

It took us 20 years to get into it and it will take us some time to get out of it. We should use our good, common sense and not tear and gut the heart and soul out of Canada by doing that, but take our time and restructure the economy the way it should be restructured.

[Translation]

Mr. Martin Cauchon (Outremont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I would simply like to add to the comments of my eloquent colleague, who clearly, has done a fair analysis of the budget situation. I would like to add, on the matter of national standards, as I mentioned earlier, that the Minister of Finance created a new transfer in the budget to be called the Canada social transfer.

The opposition is saying that again we are setting national standards for the Canada social transfer. I see nothing wrong in setting national standards. The problem with national standards—and again the opposition is trying to doctor the truth—is that, in the past, the standards were set unilaterally by the federal government. Now what we are saying, and it is in black and white in the budget, is that we are inviting all of the provinces to work together to set national standards jointly and in a spirit of co-operation.

This is the new Canadian federalism, flexible federalism, co-operative federalism. We are not trying to hide the truth or use some form of trickery to take away what is in fact in the budget and what was requested by all of the provinces.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Nault: Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly say to my colleague and to other colleagues in the House that federalism is by far one of the best systems in the world. There is a reason for that. The reason federalism works so well and why other countries wish they had a federal system like ours is because it is fluid. It is not static. The reason federalism works is its ability to be flexible.

Anyone who has analysed where we were when we first became the country of Canada and where we are today with the changes that have taken place has found that we have been able

to adapt to tremendous change when necessary. It is the reason this country has been so successful.

If this government keeps on track the way the finance minister has been going, I predict as I did in the last election that by the end of the 1990s we will have our deficit under control. We will be paying off our debt. We will be back on track. We will still be the best country in the world. Our fiscal and monetary policy will be back to where it would have been had we not had that 10 years of Tory rule which messed it all up for us.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to debate this borrowing bill, I must flag a historic event for the House. We have finally witnessed a budget that, however timid, at least attempts to cut federal spending in real terms.

It has been decades since we have seen this kind of budget and it marks a great victory for the Reform Party of Canada. This budget would have been unheard of only a few years ago. It indicates a stunning conversion on the part of the Liberal Party.

I am delighted the financial markets have reacted positively so that things may go well for our country. Above all, I wish for prosperity and stability for Canada. When that happens I am pleased, no matter who brings down the budget.

However, just as a leopard cannot change its spots, I cannot believe the Liberals have really been converted. The budget was an act of pure necessity, not something done out of the courage of their convictions. The Liberals did the bare minimum they could in order to avert a national financial disaster. Had he had his way, the Prime Minister would have increased spending and taxes even more than he did. He said as much on the CBC program "Morningside" yesterday.

In this respect there is no denying that the presence of the Reform Party of Canada in this House is a bulwark in defence of the taxpayer, a stronghold of protection of the public interest. The Reform Party, working with Canadian taxpayers, can take the credit for this change in direction.

Fifty-two members of this House put sustained pressure for a year and one-half on this government to reduce spending. The government finally responded by adopting a plank from the Reform Party agenda, just as it adopted the agenda of the NDP when that party was a factor in this House.

Although the Liberals have formed the government, there is a new game in town. Today the government is forced to respond to the criticisms from a fiscally responsible opposition, no longer from the loonie left. They still form the government and they still have the numbers in this House to pass any laws they choose, but they no longer possess the moral or political mandate from the people to complete their leftist agenda. The political mandate is passing to the Reform Party of Canada. The Reform Party is now driving the national policy agenda. In that reality, I take great satisfaction.